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ABSTRACT

Written by a 1975 high school graduate and a curriculum specialist, this monograph briefly describes the history of Ramah, New Mexico. Presenting the Navajo point of view, emphasis is on the socioeconomic influence of the Mormons and the Texas (Anglo) ranchers who settled in the Ramah area. Particular attention is given to: (1) land acquisition; (2) trading posts and the concept of "credit"; (3) Federal Government land allotments; (4) the Bureau of Indian Affairs and boarding schools; (5) the development of the Ramah Navajo (all Indian) School Board; and (6) the value of education and law to the Ramah Navajo. (JC)

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THE ANGLOS AND THE MORMONS COME TO RAMAH

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1975
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By

Sampson Martinez
Ramah High School Graduate, 1975

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$1.00 from

Ramah Navajo Press
Box 245
Ramah, New Mexico 87321

Ramah Valley is a wide rolling valley. Much of the area is covered by juniper and pinon trees. On top of the mesas there are many ponderosa pines. Long ago the valley was covered by tall thick grass. There were a lot of animals. It was very beautiful then, and only Navajo lived here. Then the Mormons and Anglos came. Where did they come from?

For many thousands of years the Anglos lived in a place called Europe. There were many different tribes of Anglos, like the Angles, the Picts, the Celts, the Goths and many more. Some Anglos lived in big cities like Rome. Anglos are today called Anglos because of the one tribe called Angles that lived in England. (Anglos' Land)

There are today many different countries in Europe where these Anglo tribes once lived; countries like England, France, Germany, Italy and Spain. The Anglos left Europe to come to America because they wanted freedom and better government. When they got here, they started taking Indian land. They did not allow the Indians the freedom they themselves wanted.

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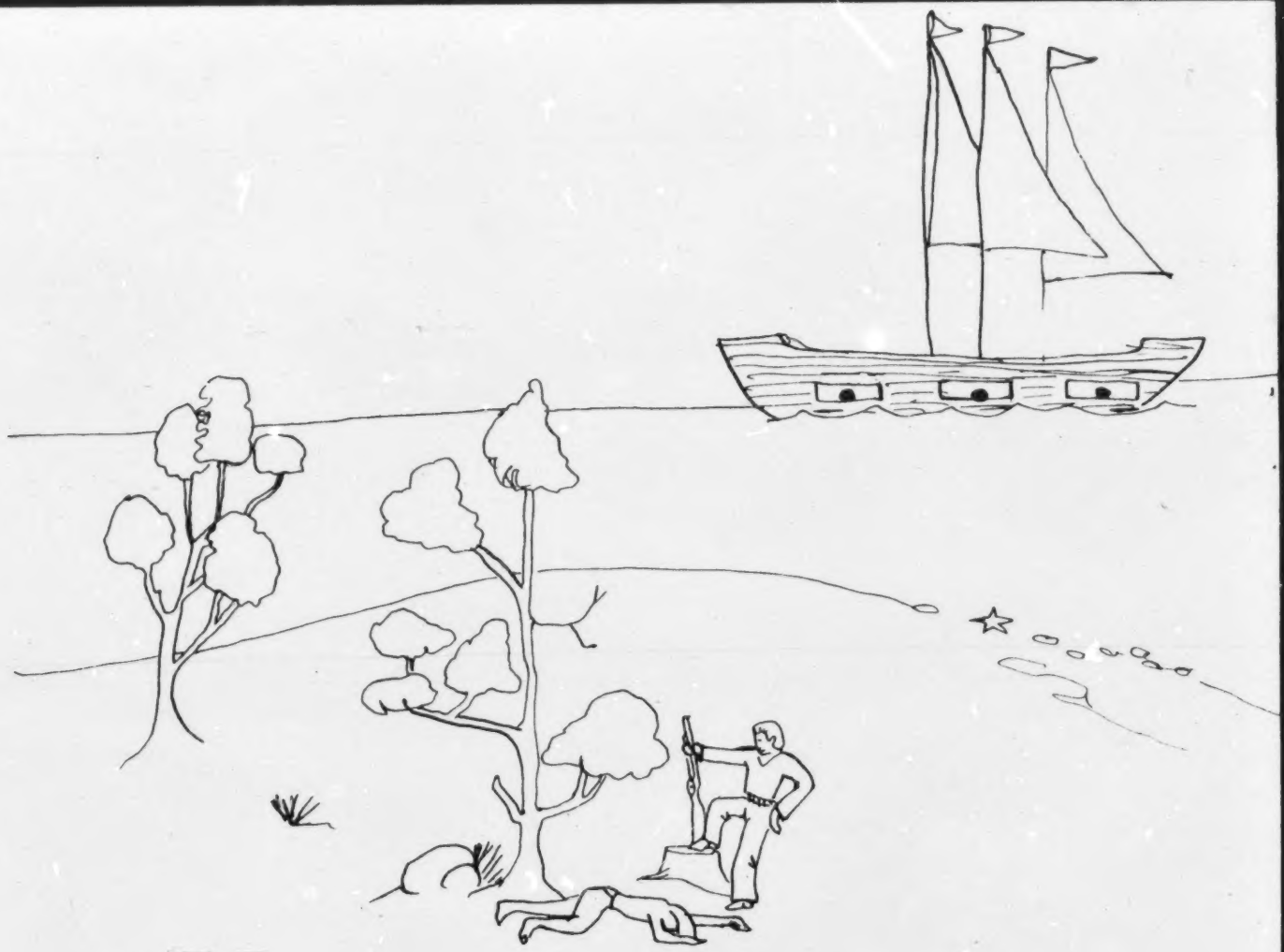

Many Anglos came from Europe and settled in what is now New York, state. They drove out the Iroquois people who once lived there. They took the Iroquois lands and forced the Iroquois onto reservations. The Iroquois today are still fighting to hold onto the land they have left.

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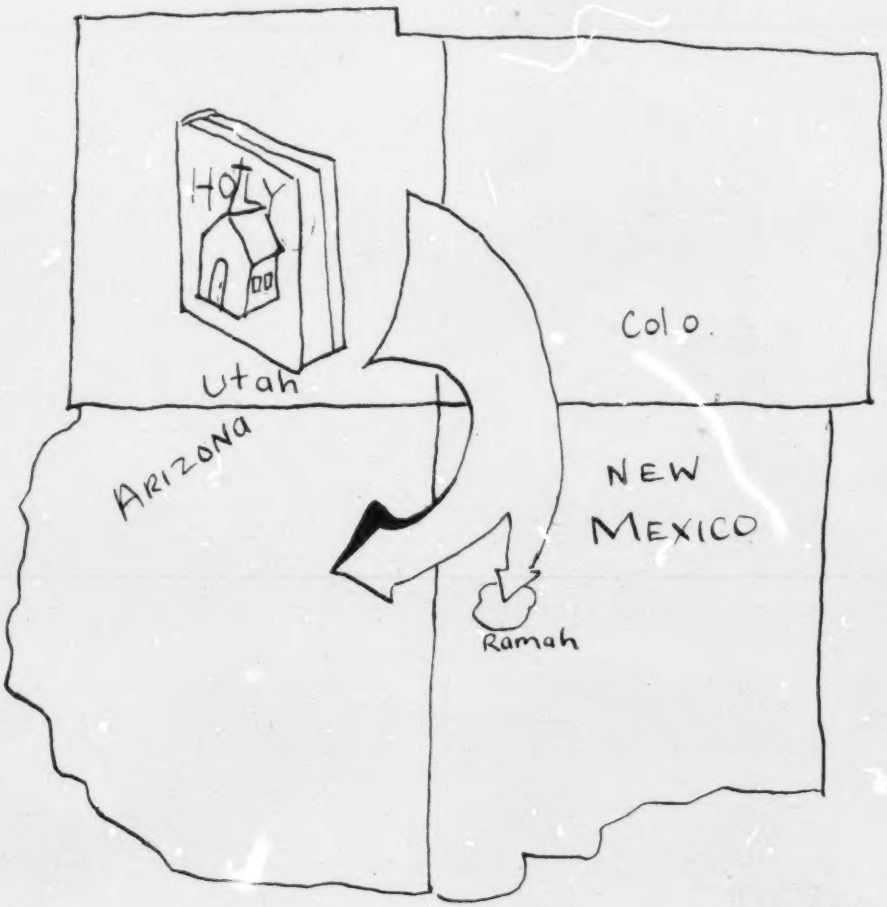
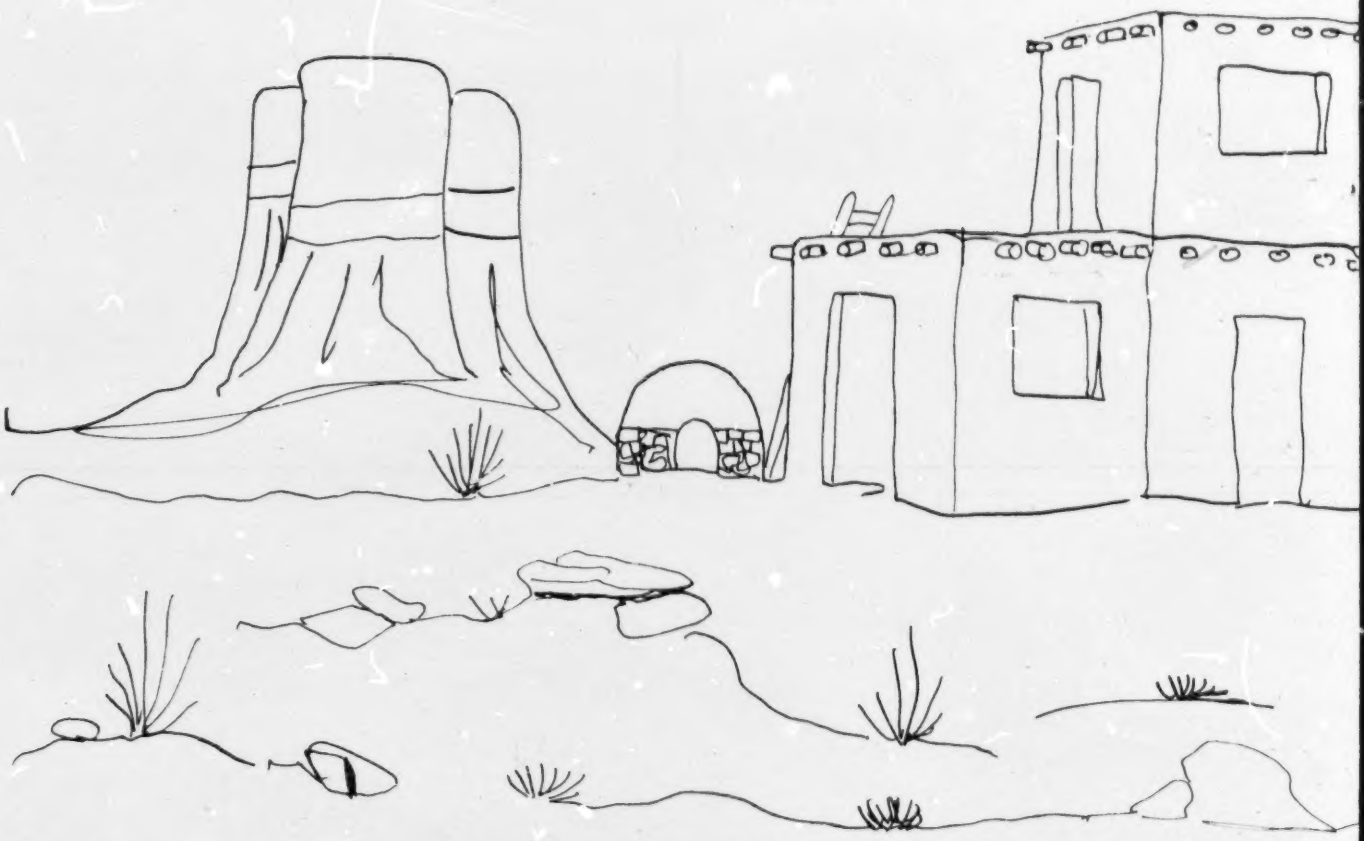


One of these Anglos, a man named Joseph Smith, dreamed that he found some golden tablets with a book written on them. He wrote the Book of Morman and started the Mormon Church. The Mormons were chased across the U.S. by the American Army. Finally the Mormons settled in Utah with their prophet, Brigham Young. Salt Lake City is today the biggest Morman City. From Utah, the Mormons spread south into New Mexico and Arizona, onto Navajo Land.



The Navajo name for Ramah is Tł'ohchiní, because of all the wild onions that grow here. The Mormons called their settlement Cebolla. Cebolla is the Spanish word for onion. But the Mormons also spelled Cebolla as Cibola. Cibola was the seven cities of gold the Spanish were looking for when they invaded the Southwest. They thought Zuni Pueblo was made of gold, so they attacked and captured Hawikuh. They were very disappointed when they found the buildings were made of mud and stones, not gold.

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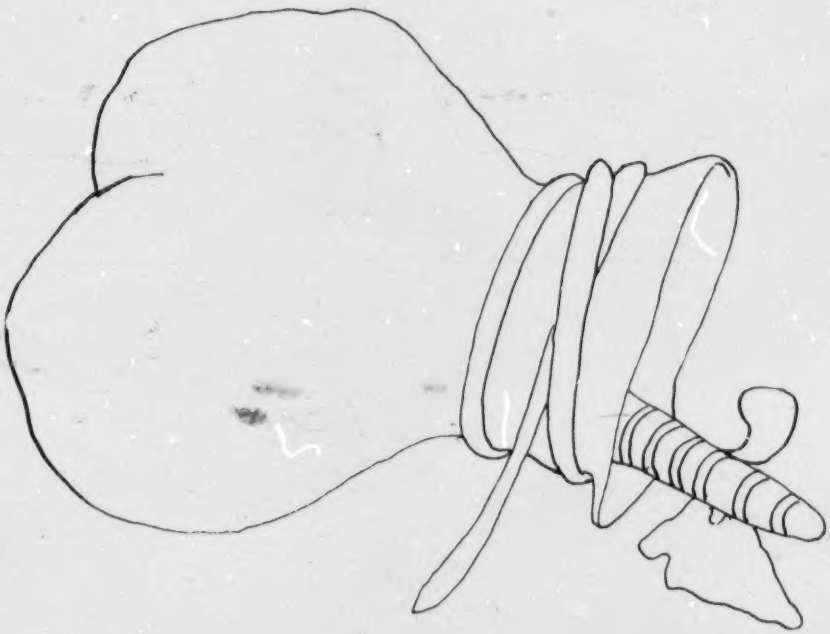
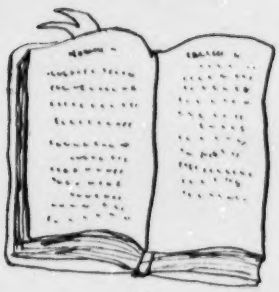
The first whites to come to Ramah were Mormon explorers looking for land to farm. Then Mormon missionaries came. They wanted the Navajos to join their church. The Mormons settled on Little Cebolla Creek, 5 miles north of Ramah Navajo High School. At that time, the Navajo people were living on the good land in the valley where the Mormons are now.

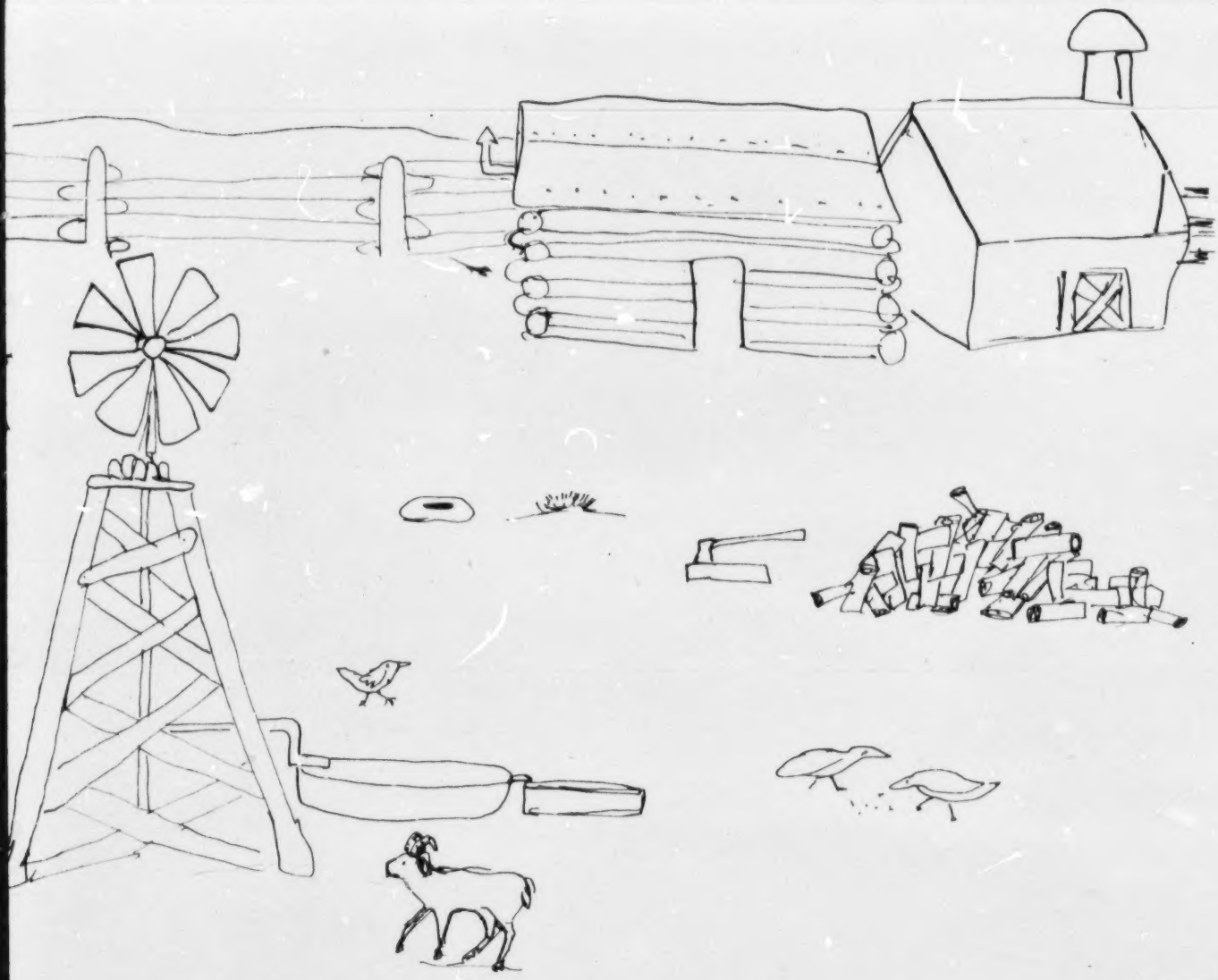
The first Mormon settlement was 10 log cabins at Cebolla. Then the Mormons built another village over near Tinaja. Small pox killed many Mormons and the rest returned to Utah.

More and more Mormons came to Ramah. They came from Utah and Arizona. They came from Mexico when Pancho Villa's Revolution chased them out. They built houses and a church. They built a new dam where the Navajos had built their dam. The Mormons then called the place Navajo. Later they named it Ramah after a town in the Bible.

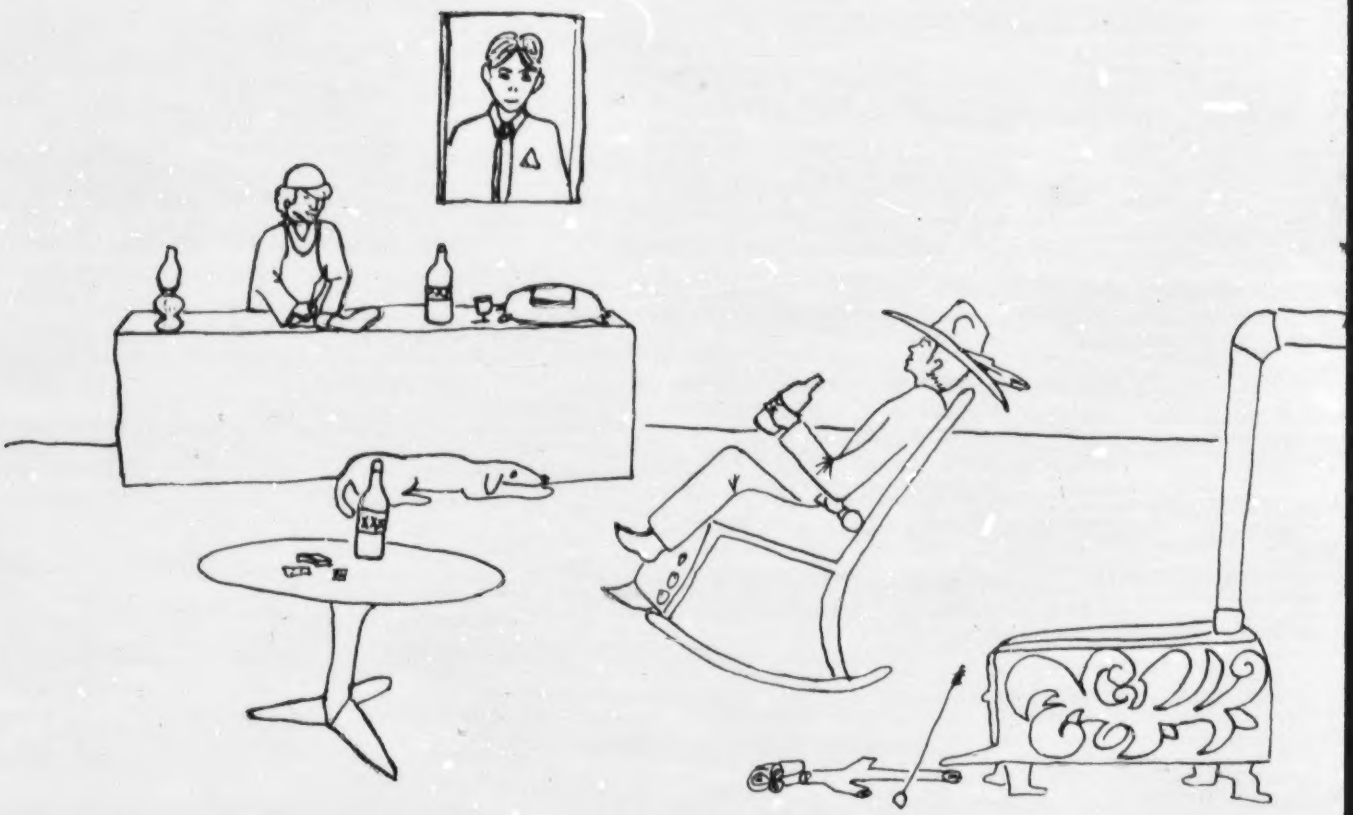




The Mormons did not convert many Navajo to their church. The Mormons took more and more land. Traders cheated the Navajo. The Navajo name for one of the traders was Big Liar. But, the Navajo did not fight back. Why?



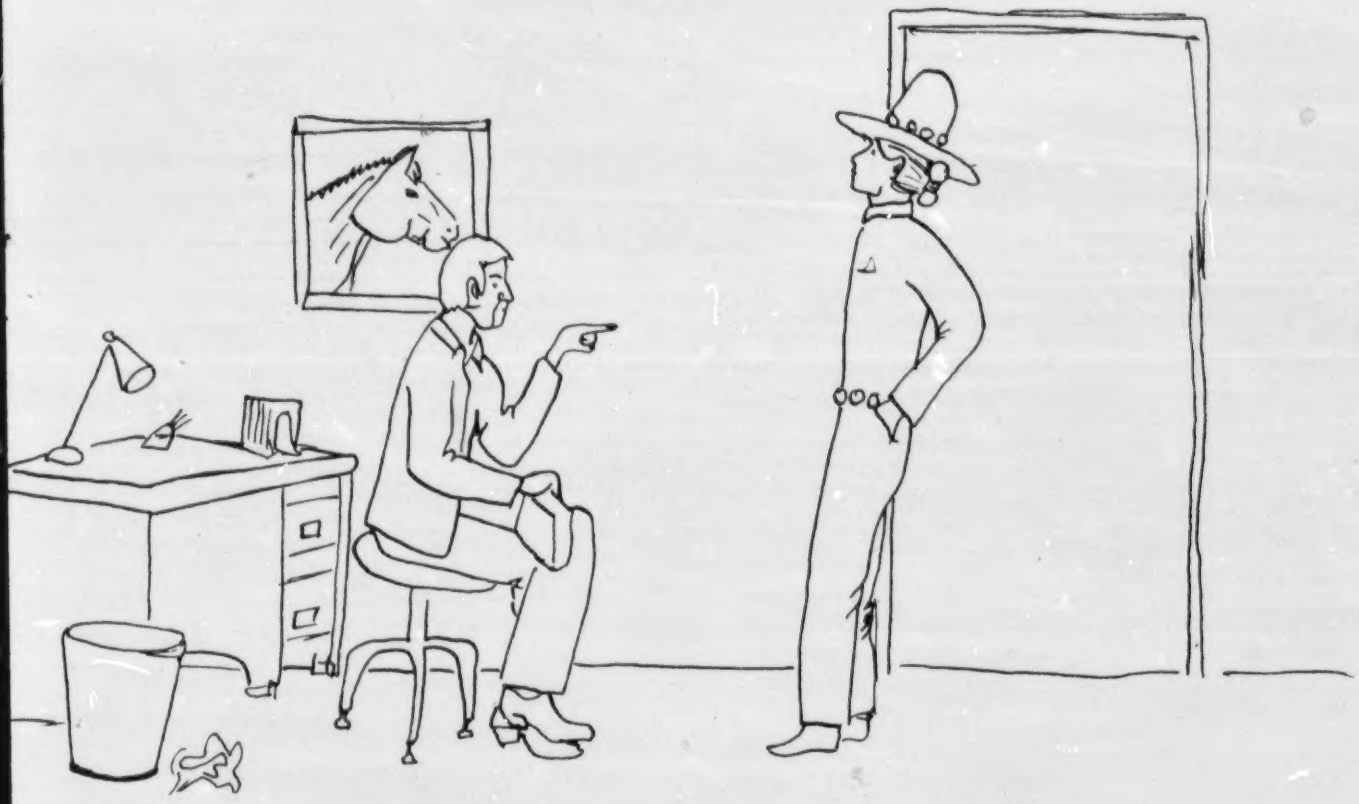
At the same time, Anglo ranchers from Texas were moving into the Zuni Mountains. They were taking more Navajo land and setting up big cattle ranches.



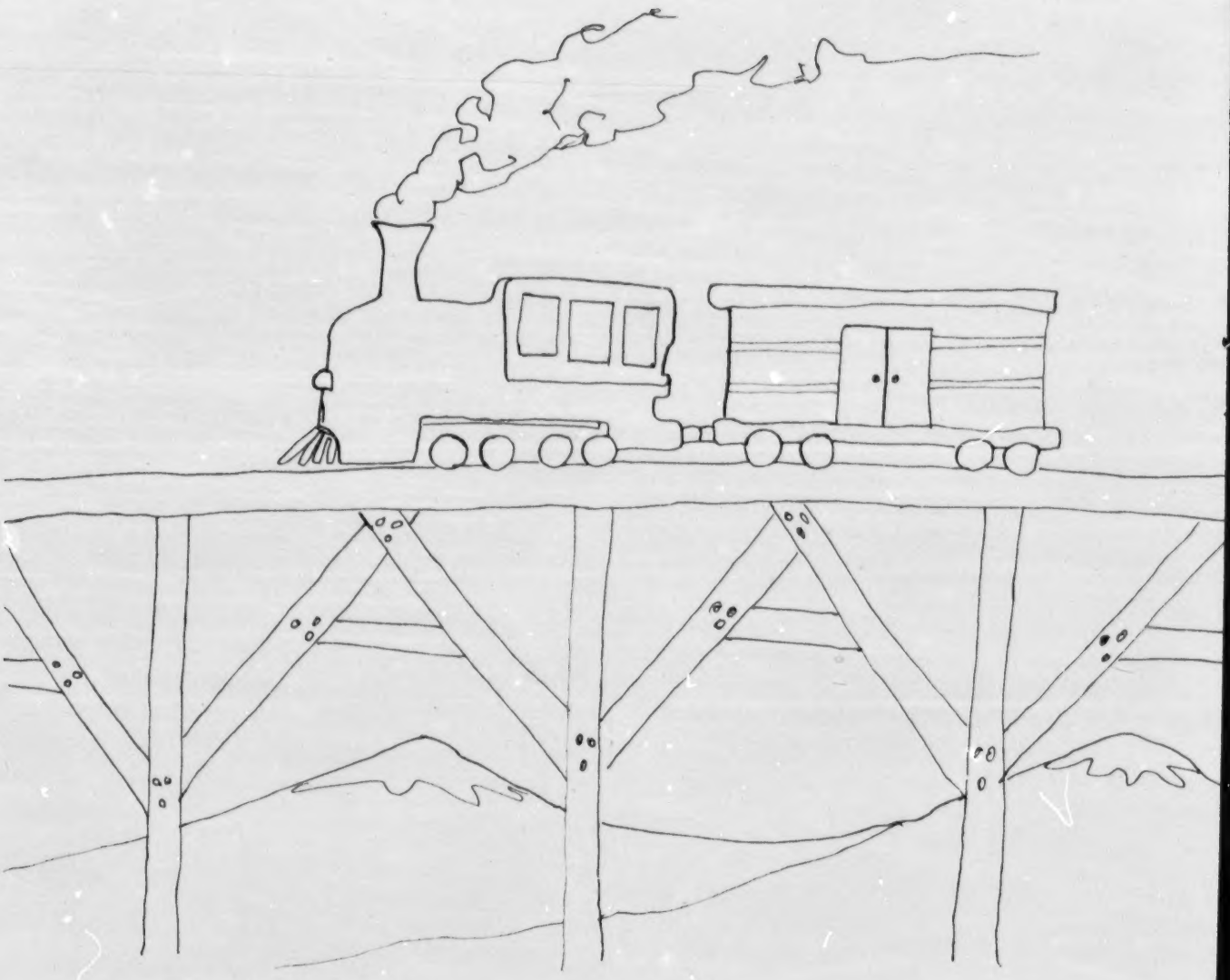
More and more Anglos moved into Ramah. Cattle ranchers from Texas took over the lava beds south and east of Ramah. Homesteading farmers arrived from Texas. They settled around Tinaja and El Morro. These farms have now eroded and lost their topsoil. The Texans also opened stores to sell things to the Navajos.

Most Navajo contact with the Mormons was at Mormon-owned trading posts. There the Navajos could buy things like cotton clothes and metal goods that they couldn't make. The Navajo became more and more dependent on things they could get only at the trading post. They didn't realize they were often paying a 300% markup. The trading post had three prices one for Mormons, a higher one for Anglos and the highest price for Navajos. The People got into debt with the traders. They raised more and more sheep to pay for the things they bought at the trading posts. Traders hung around lamb sales like a bunch of hawks waiting to pounce on the Navajo who owed them money.

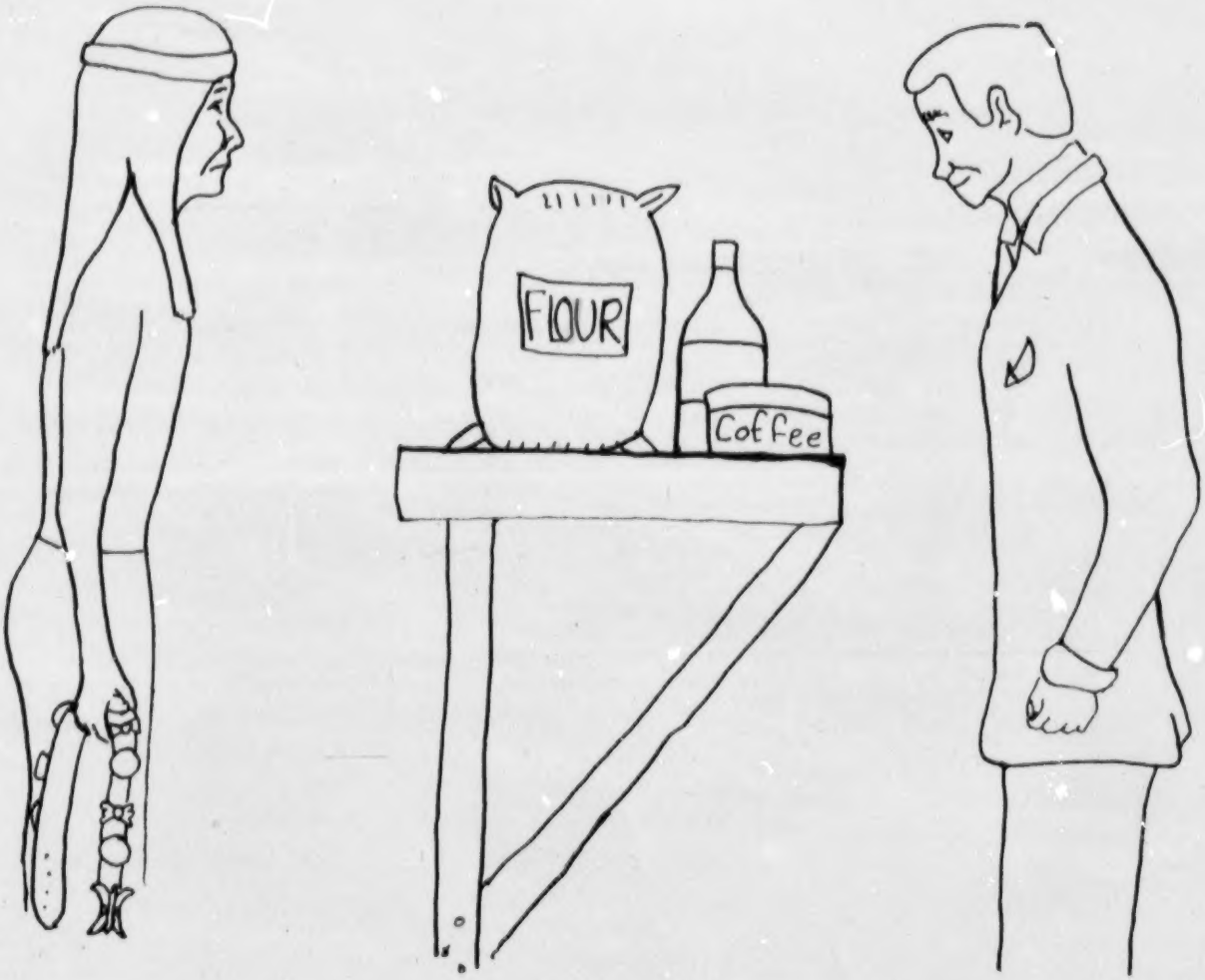
The Navajo farmed and hunted less. Crops and deer meat were worth less than wool and hides. The traders introduced the idea of credit so the Navajo could run up big bills and pay them off with lambs and wool. The Navajo didn't understand this Anglo economy. Traders grew richer and richer. The Navajo grew poorer and poorer. The traders used money they got from the Navajo People to buy Navajo land. So the Navajo lost both their money and their land.



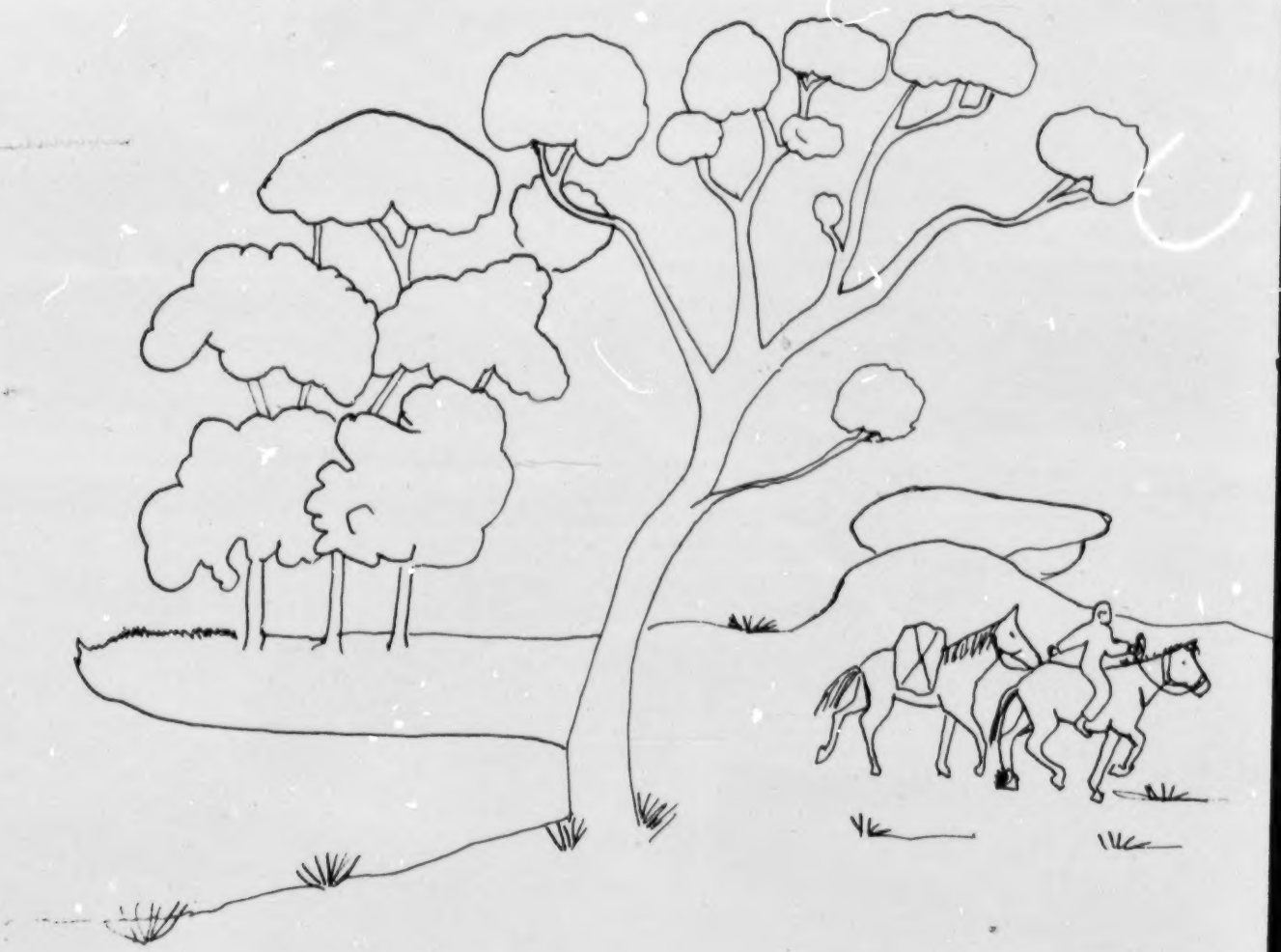
The Navajo People of Ramah ran into race prejudice. The Anglos and Mormons did not respect Navajo culture. They did not respect Navajo law. The Anglos and Mormons wanted the Navajo to become little brown Anglos. The Anglos and Mormons were backed by Washington.



Washington took land from the Navajo and gave it to the railroads. They took every other section of Navajo land in a strip 100 miles wide. A section is a piece of land one mile square. This made the Ramah Navajo Peoples' land look like a checkerboard. The railroad that now runs through Gallup was surveyed to run through Ramah on its way from Chicago to Los Angeles.



The Navajo retreated to parts of Ramah where there were no Anglos and Mormons. The Mormons took the best land. The Navajo people lost the best lands. The Mormons traded with the Navajo. The traders tried to make the Navajo cash all of their government checks at the trading posts. When there was conflict the Navajo people lost. There was nothing the Navajo could do.

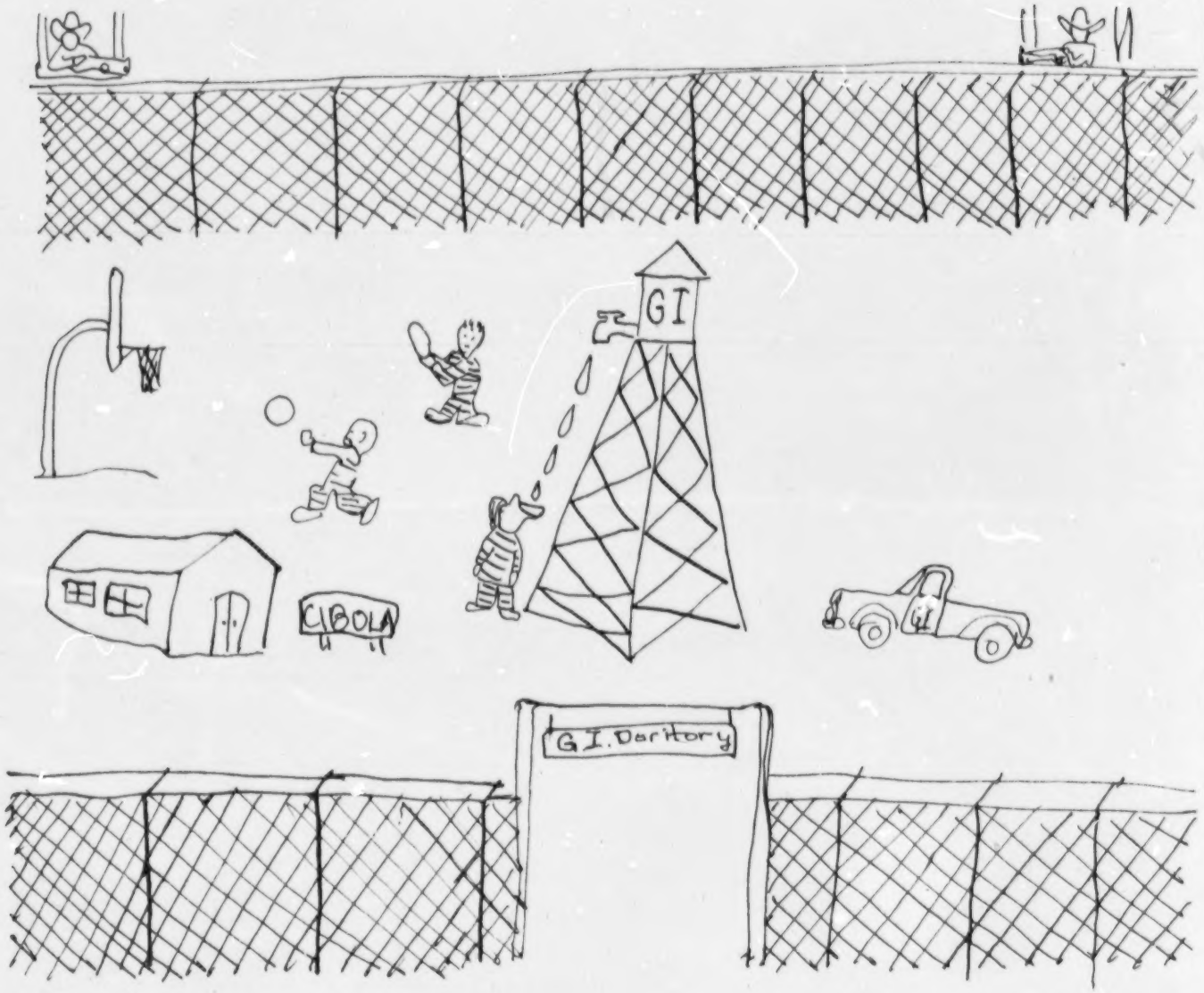


The Mormons took more and more of the land. The Navajo withdrew further and further from the good land. The Mormons kept on trying to convert the Navajo People to The Mormon Church. The Navajo did not become converted.

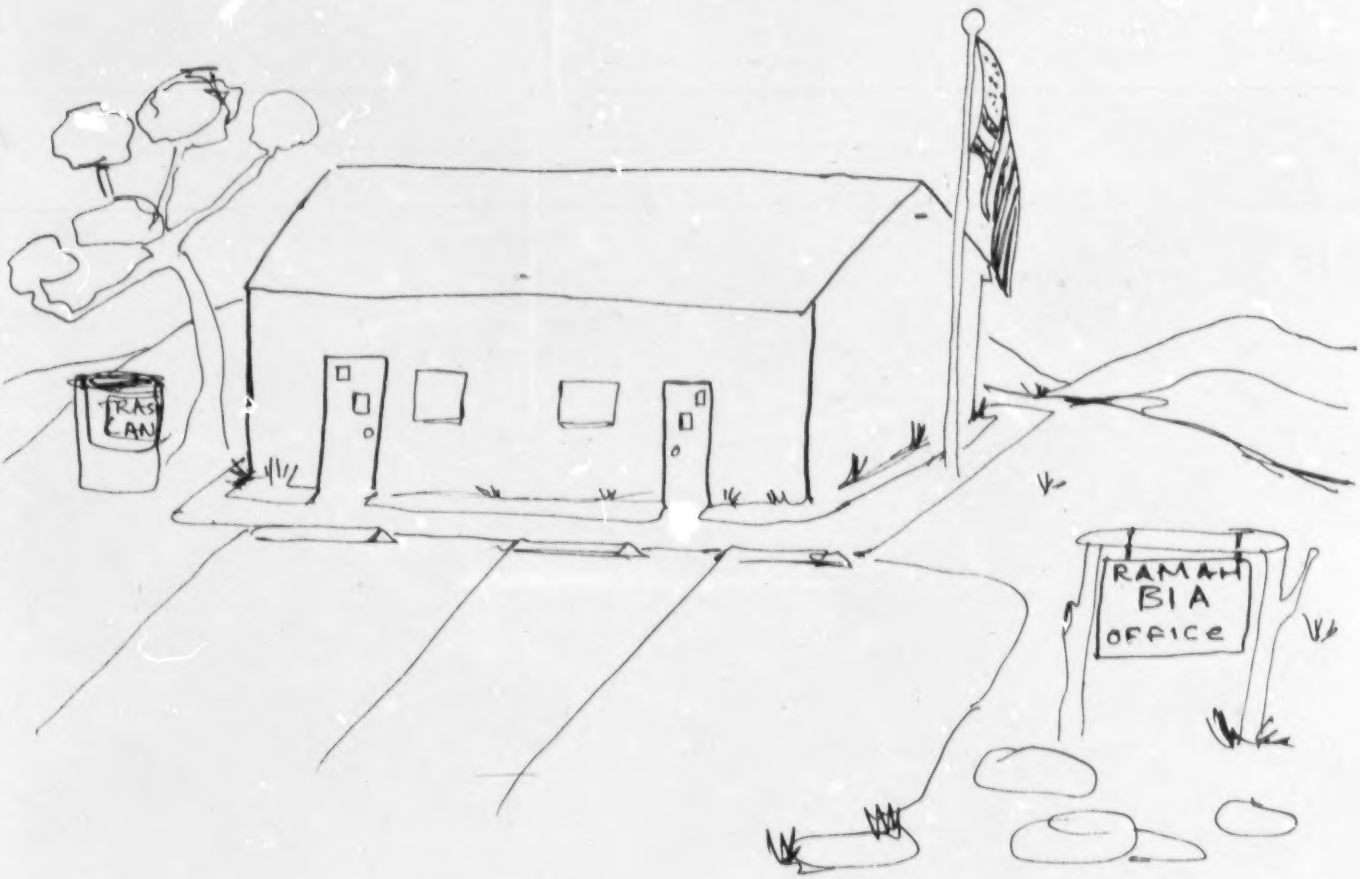
The Anglos and Mormons were taking over more and more Navajo land. They fenced the land and kept the Navajos out. The Anglos and Mormons made deeds to legalize their theft of Navajo land. The Navajo had no rights to their own land! Washington allotted quarter sections (160 acres) to individual Navajo. This land was mostly in the lava beds, where it takes three sections (1920 acres) to support one Navajo family. Some Navajo had deeds to their lands. The Mormons tried to get these deeds to get this land. The Anglos and Mormons ran their livestock on Navajo land.

Anglos and Mormons now owned most of the land. The Navajo peoples' land was split up by Anglo and Mormon lands. This is called checkerbroading. The Navajo continued to retreat from the good lands to the bad lands. They depended more and more on the Anglos' trading post economy. When the Ramah Navajo started a co-op, the traders banded together trying in every possible way to destroy it.

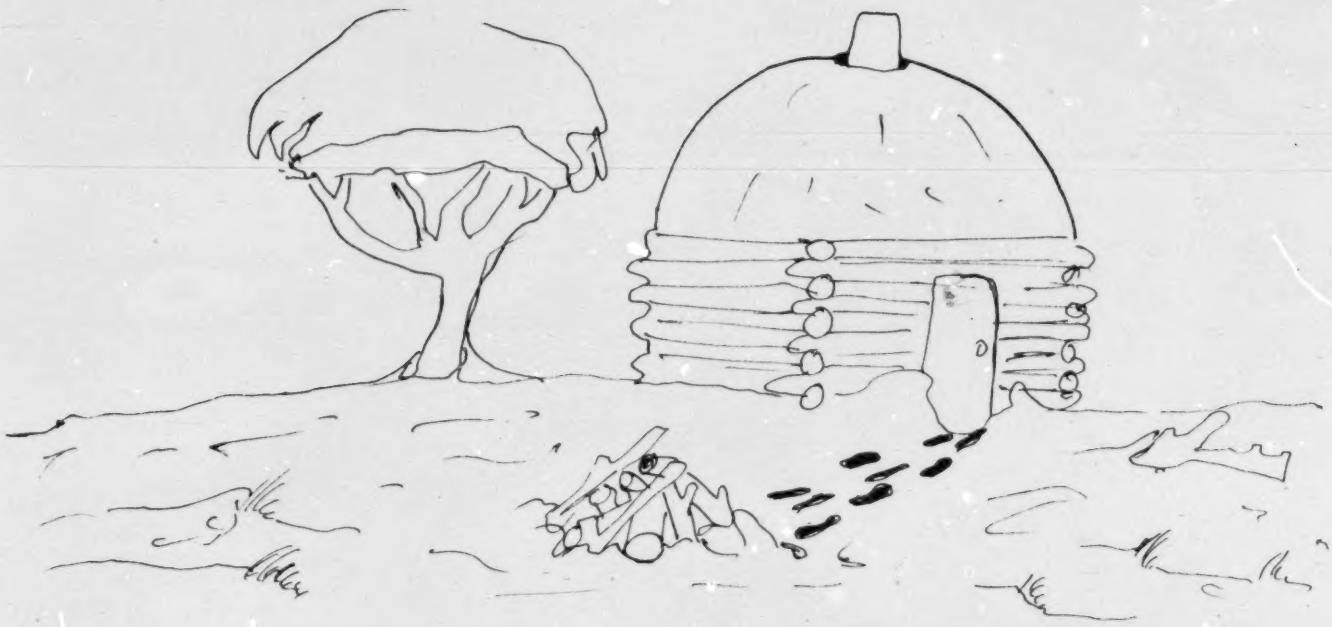
In the 1920's many of the Texas ranchers moved away from Ramah because of lower cattle prices. But the Navajo kept moving off of the better land to their allotments on land which was not so good.



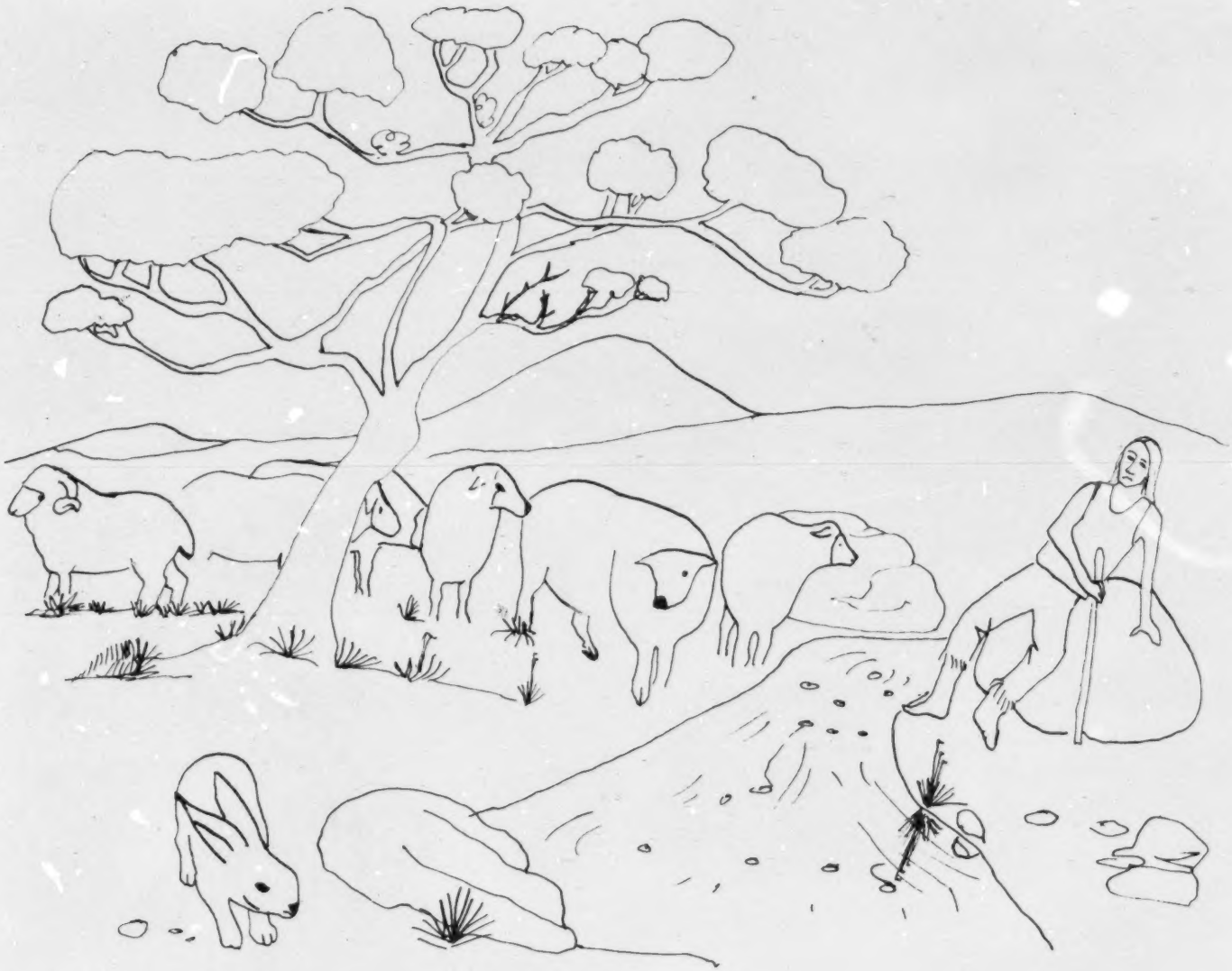
At this same time the B.I.A. started to send Ramah Navajo children to far-off boarding schools in Santa Fe and Albuquerque, and later to Fort Wingate.



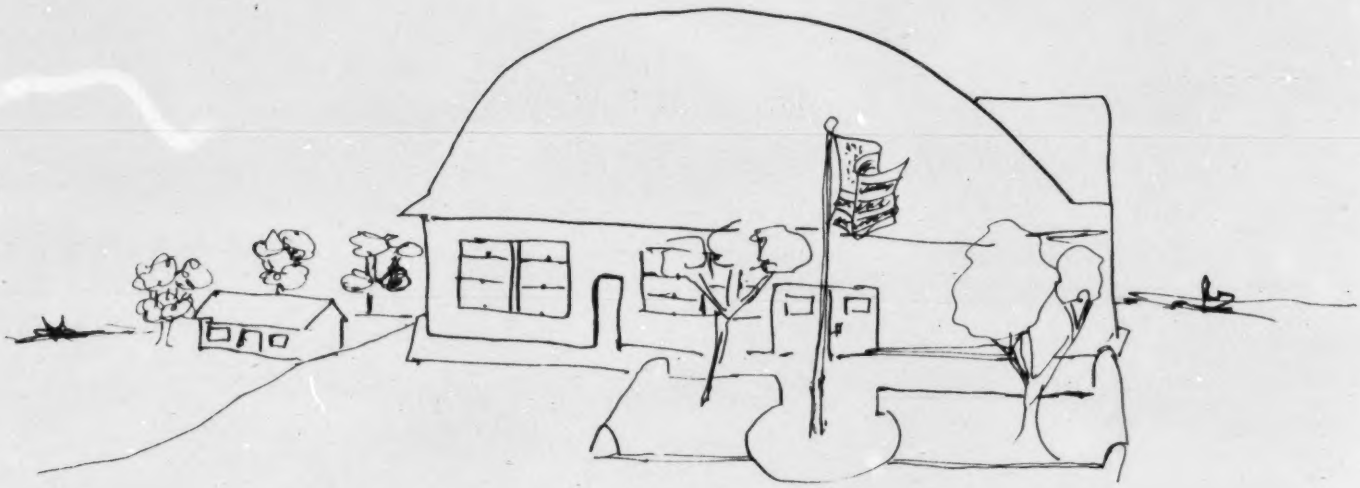
In 1927 BIA control of Ramah was changed from Zuni to Crownpoint. In 1942, Ramah came under BIA United Pueblos in Albuquerque, In 1972 Ramah became a separate BIA agency, under the Albuquerque Area Office.



The depression of the 1930's drove many poor Anglo families to Ramah. The local Mormons took out their depression anger on the Navajo. 1931 was a bad winter. Thirty inches of snow fell on November 23rd. Flocks died and the Navajo People starved.

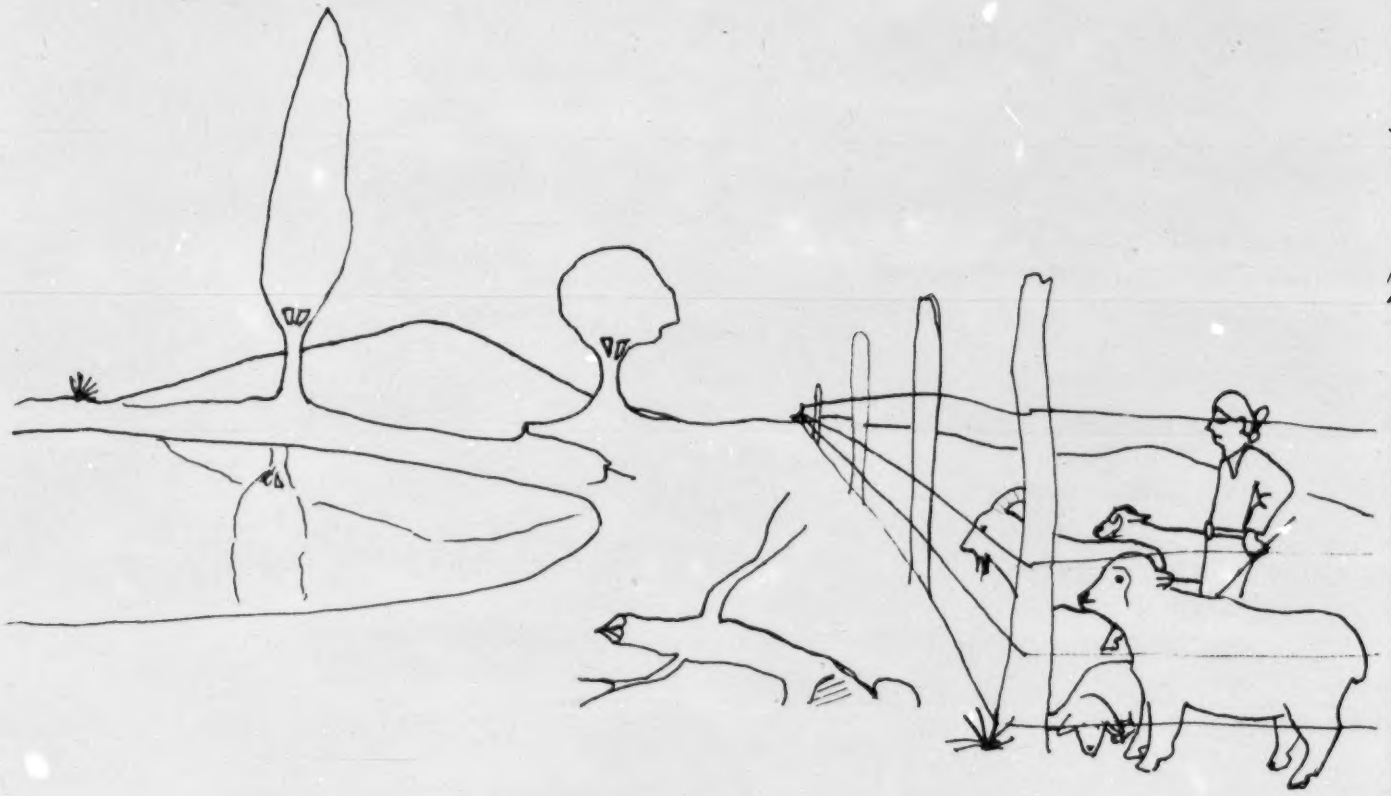


New Federal agencies came to help the Ramah Navajo People. A new kind of Anglo came to Ramah, the bureaucrat. They tried to make Ramah a part of the main reservation. They leased land from the railroads and the cattle companies for the Navajo to graze their sheep on.

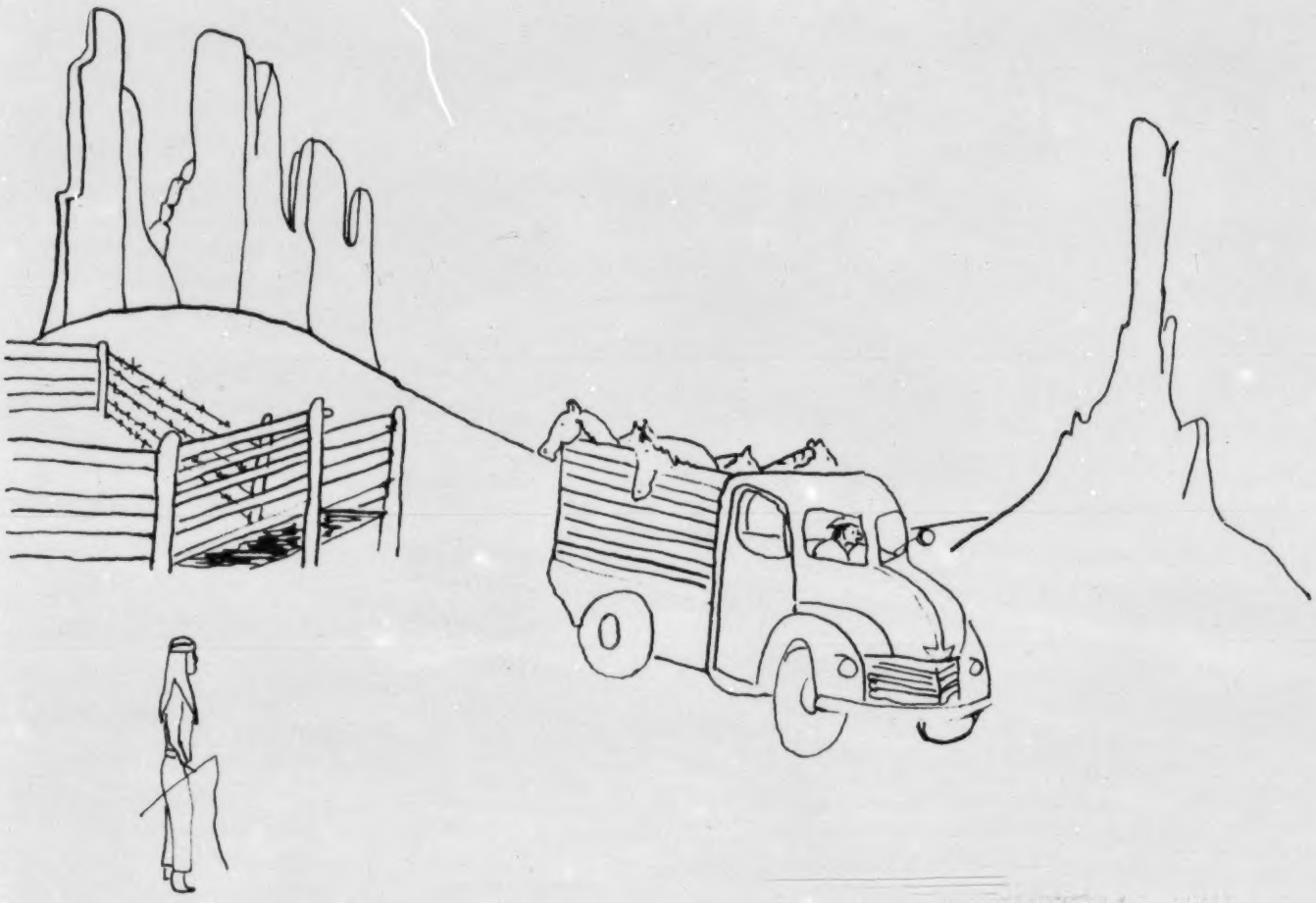


The Federal bureaucreats hired Navajo to improve the land with dams and water wells and roads. The Ramah Navajo People worked under Mormon supervision on these jobs. As things got worse for the Mormons and Anglos with the depression, they tried to get back at the Navajo The Anglos and Mormons didn't like the New Deal Programs, even though they got a new dam and a new school and local foreman's jobs bossing Navajo laborers. "We Whites," they said, "have got to stick together against smart Indians."

The Navajos now began to get back some of the land they had lost. In the past, the federal government had helped the Anglos and Mormons against the Navajos. Now the federal government helped the Navajos against the Anglos and Mormons. The government helped The Navajos get their lands back from Anglos and Mormons.



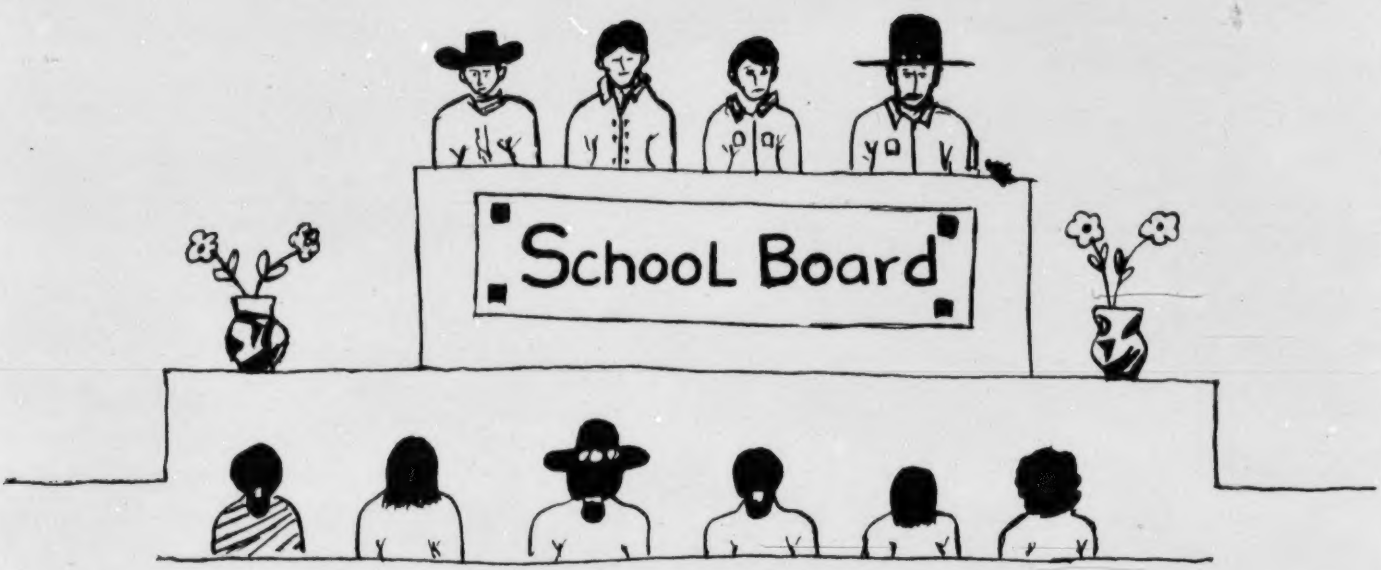
World War II cut off government monies from the Navajos. The Anglos and Mormons bought up railroad lands cheap. The church in Salt Lake City made a big loan so Ramah Mormons could buy up a piece of land from an Albuquerque Chicano, on which the Navajo People had lived for hundreds of years. The Anglos and Mormons pushed the Navajos off these lands. The Anglos' and Mormons' fences kept the Navajo sheep from the water.



Many of these new ideas from Washington ignored the Navajo ways of life. Some of these new ideas like stock reduction went against nature. Some of these new ideas seemed like more Anglos' tricks directed against the Navajo People

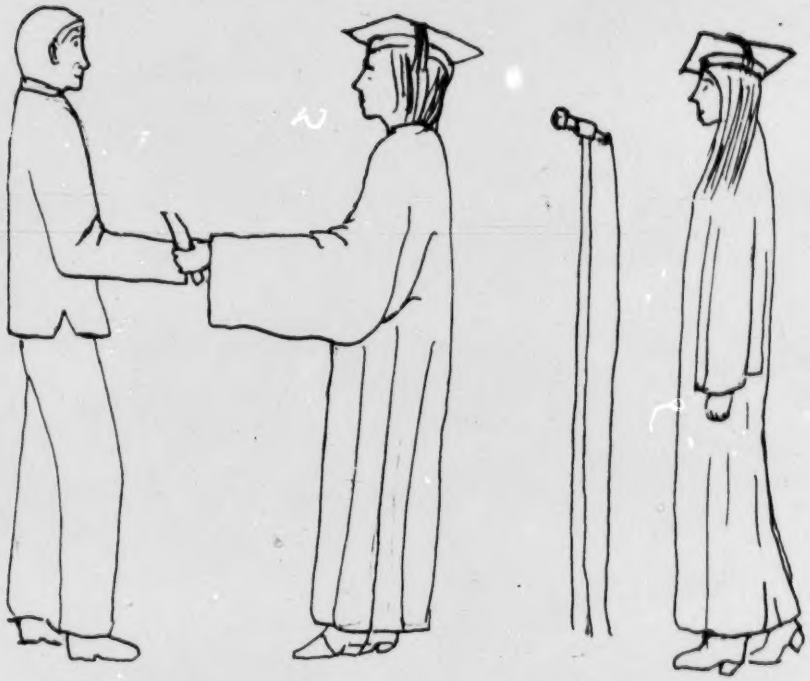
Now, The Ramah Navajo People have learned how to use Anglo laws to fight back at Anglos and Mormons. One Navajo man from Ramah went to court in Gallup to stop the Mormons from taking land. He won in court, but by this time it was to late. The Anglos and the Mormons had already built so many fences that Navajo sheep could not get to water. The Mormons put up NO TRESPASSING signs. The Navajo had lost most of their best land. There was no more land left. "The next time that one those Navies leaves one of my gates open, I am going to shoot him." Such was the Mormon feeling about their fences.

Missionaries told the Navajo People to give up the Navajo way of life. Anglo and Mormon teachers told the kids in school not to speak Navajo. Navajo Students were punished for speaking Navajo. Many Navajo began to think that it's bad to be Navajo and good to be Anglo or Mormon.

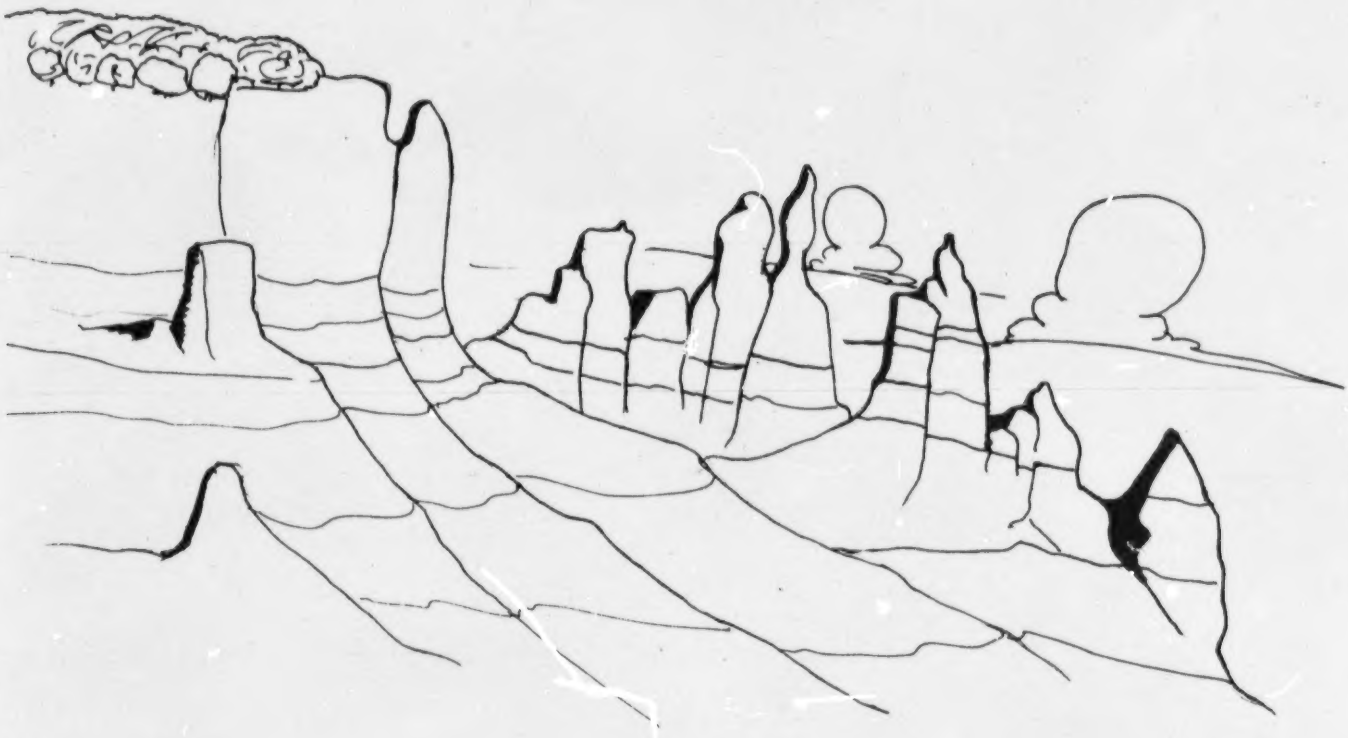


In 1970 all this began to change. The Ramah Navajo People elected an all Navajo School Board to set up Ramah Navajo High School. Here at Ramah Navajo High School we can study our own language, Navajo, as well as English, the language of the whiteman. We can study our own culture and history. We now know that we are proud to be Navajo and that it is good to be Navajo and that we will be good strong Navajo men and women when we grow up.

But we must still fight for our school. The School Board often has to go to Washington to get the money to build our new school, to pay for our books and things, to keep our school open and growing. We get help from the laws passed by the Congress. We have many friends in Congress. "Don't worry," Senator Montoya told the Board, "We'll get you your money."



We Navajo students are the leaders of tomorrow. The People need us - lawyers, engineers, teachers, doctors, farmers, ranchers. The People need us. Manuelito said that education is the ladder. Let's climb it. We are Navajo. We are strong. We are proud of our language and our culture. We are going to take what we want from the white man's language and culture and beat him at this own game.



The land of Ramah is ours. It is our precious gift from our parents and grandparents. The Earth is our mother. We must love and care for the land of Ramah. It is our past. It is our present. It is our future.

T'áá Ákótí